
Issues and Findings Report and Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

River Road and Santa Clara

**Prepared for
City of Eugene**

Element of the Transition Manager Contract

David Reed & Associates, Inc.

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“We will need fresh vision, new practices, and better public processes to straighten out immediate problems, to develop a new path that has mainstream endorsement, and to make the transition work.”

Charles Kittleson

Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

Overview

The *Summary of Stakeholder Interviews Report* outlines the issues, findings and conclusions that have emerged from interviews with River Road and Santa Clara stakeholders, service providers and a few elected officials as well as information gathered from our research and review of agency reports, public documents and other sources. These interviews and summary report will provide the context for preparing a scope of work for a transition plan as part of a contract between the City of Eugene and David Reed and Associates, Inc.

Over 35 stakeholders, service providers, and other interested parties were interviewed in late spring and summer. Emphasis was placed on interviewing as representative a group of people as possible, and notes from these interviews are strictly confidential.

Purpose Strategy Confidentiality

Changes in the demographic profile of River Road/Santa Clara area are profound – in part a function of rapid urban development over the past decade, and in part due to a greater diversity of people who have moved into the area. These changes are a driving force behind the need for improving delivery of services, and understanding how this should be accomplished. Residents who need services today are more diverse than those served 20 years ago when annexation and service delivery issues first gained prominent attention. Key themes associated with the current demographics and patchwork of City and County properties underscore the rationale for accelerated transition planning.

Overall Theme

Overall Themes:

- The contentious environment in the RR/SC area is a legacy of past interactions between the City and RR/SC residents—particularly with respect to mandatory sewer line hook-ups and active annexation in the 1980s.
- Fertile ground exists for innovation and creative thinking.
- A long-term vision with short-term results and opportunities is needed to address the complex issues and challenges.
- Quid pro quo will be an essential cornerstone for assuring buy-in to any solutions.
- Community livability is highly valued by residents in the area.

Interview Themes:

Themes from this interview process were often similar to those identified in the *River Road and Santa Clara Urban Services Committees Final Report*, September 2002.

These included:

- On-going lack of trust that area residents feel toward the City of Eugene and its agenda for the RR/SC areas
- Lack of a real voice in decisions with respect to planning, development/street standards, and permitting; county residents feel “abandoned” by county government
- Residents feel disenfranchised both within the City and in the County
- City residents in the RR/SC areas have a perception that urban services are not provided in an equitable fashion when compared to other neighborhoods in the City
- Preserving the special character of RR/SC neighborhoods is a major concern, particularly in the face of rapid development in the area.

In addition, lack of information about such issues as when permits and annexation are required for residential improvements or development, or which entity provides services in the complicated patchwork of City and County residences, exacerbates distrust and provides opportunities for rumors and exploitation of residents’ fears.

“No one has made any sense of this and how to bring all of the pieces together.”

Challenges

*“Don’t force curbs and gutters
and all those urban street
standards on small
developments.”*

*“If the City will assure me that
my street will not be widened
with curbs and gutters, I will be
glad to be annexed.”*

The key challenges facing the River Road and Santa Clara area include:

ISSUE 1: Rapid growth, development, and transition to City of Eugene services are changing the character of neighborhoods and are perceived as a threat to community livability, sense of place, and community.

- The Eugene Land Use Code was recently amended to reflect MetroPlan policy for low density residential development at urban densities, and increased density is reflected in RR/SC. Infilling is taking place at a high rate, many residents are subdividing or selling their lots, and frequently new housing is in high contrast to existing large lots and residential development that has traditionally been more semi-rural in character.
- Residents are most concerned about prospects of urban street standards that would change the character of their tree-lined streets that currently have no curbs, gutters, or sidewalks.
- Increased traffic, pedestrian safety, and the symbolism of the widening of historic River Road and loss of trees represent major concerns of residents.
- Growth and infilling are occurring so rapidly that some residents believe it may be too late for transition planning to manage growth more effectively or preserve neighborhoods.
- Potential loss of identity of the River Road Park District and Santa Clara Fire Protection District through urban transition represent threats to loss of a sense of community, since these long-standing institutions have cultivated family and community solidarity over many years.
- With rapid growth and development, demographic change is creating a wide divergence of opinions and concerns about the future of the area.

ISSUE 2: As urbanizing communities, River Road and Santa Clara have evolved into highly complex, disjointed and confusing mosaics of fragmented service deliveries provided by multiple jurisdictions and agencies within a patchy and frequently disconnected urban growth pattern.

- Service providers for residents outside the city include two rural fire protection districts, two water districts (contracted with EWEB), a park district, metropolitan wastewater service (City of Eugene), and services provided by the county that include stormwater management (inside the road ROW), road maintenance, and public safety. Services for residents within the City of Eugene include public safety, fire and emergency medical, road maintenance, stormwater management, wastewater management, parks and recreation, planning, building, and neighborhood support. EWEB provides water and electric service. Both River Road and Santa Clara are within the 4-J School District.
- Several intergovernmental agreements establish roles and responsibilities for service providers in the transition area. Dissolving or merging special districts is surfacing as an issue as the City annexes properties and the districts experience loss of their tax base. An urban transition agreement transferred land use responsibility from Lane County to the City of Eugene in 1987.

“There needs to be some kind of checks and balances for people to trust any agreements with the City at this point.”

“The City just wants to figure out when the electorate will support annexation, or when the City’s tax base is such that bond measures won’t get voted down—then it’ll move to annex the whole area.”

“If the City has a lockstep approach for how annexation occurs, and doesn’t allow citizen input on what standards and services are needed, it’ll be a huge mess.”

- In 1979, Oregon Boundary Commissioner Diane Nechak described the special service districts in Santa Clara as a “mess of unparalleled proportions anywhere else in the state.”

ISSUE 3: Government distrust and perceptions of abandonment have disenfranchised a large number of residents in the River Road and Santa Clara areas.

- Some residents harbor feelings of “victimization” over mandatory sewer connections and perceived hardships resulting from large assessments.
- Some residents are frustrated by their desire to live in a rural setting while being forced to connect to the city sewer and ultimately to become annexed.
- Some residents outside the city feel abandoned by Lane County as Eugene has assumed more responsibility for planning and land use within the Urban Growth Boundary, and the County has narrowed its role to road improvements and maintenance, and public safety.
- Many older residents want to “be left alone” while many newer residents have a desire to “fix current concerns and/or problems.”

ISSUE 4: The City’s current annexation process intensifies the pre-existing hostile environment and inhibits creative and collaborative problem-solving within community stakeholders.

- The “Eugene-Springfield Metro Area General Plan” specifies “The City of Eugene shall provide urban services to the River Road and Santa Clara neighborhoods upon annexation” (Policy #5, II-D-7). Additionally the Metro Plan states that “. . . Eugene will make every reasonable attempt to provide for annexation only on a voluntary basis and according to prior individual property annexation agreements” (Policy #4, II-D-7). Finally the Metro Plan directs the city to “. . . develop methods of financing improvements in the River Road and Santa Clara areas that are responsive to the unique situation of residents and property owners, as well as the City of Eugene” (Policy #2, II-D-7).
- Many residents believe the City’s goal is wholesale annexation in an expedited manner, which fuels strong opposition and a desire for a public vote on annexation.
- Incremental, non-contiguous annexation is perceived negatively by many residents, who view the process as intensifying an irregular, fragmented, and confusing urbanization pattern, with differing levels of service that are expensive and inefficient.
- Many residents believe city annexation results in higher taxes with a lower level of service than what they now receive.

ISSUE 5: A lack of basic information contributes to an environment of misunderstanding and distrust (e.g. what home improvements actually trigger annexation; who processes permits; who delivers services).

- Given the confusing jurisdictional environment, there is a major gap in public information in terms of property owners’ understanding of basic service functions, operations, and procedures, and who the service providers are and their responsibilities.

“Why pay the City’s taxes if the services aren’t any better than what we have now?”

Opportunities

“River Road and Santa Clara residents are concerned and knowledgeable about their neighborhood. We want to begin a collaborative effort to protect the unique character of our area.”

- A high degree of incorrect information is disseminated throughout the community, partly because the annexation process is so cumbersome and difficult to understand, and partly because mythical interpretations and occasional innuendo is used to build opposition to change.
- The adopted land use plan for River Road and Santa Clara is the “Urban Facility Plan” prepared in 1987. While the plan includes a land use diagram with land use policies and recommendations, the focus of the plan is largely on public infrastructure with a small section on environmental design and very generalized park planning considerations. When residents speak of the need for a neighborhood refinement plan, it is apparent that they have in mind a more visionary and comprehensive land use plan than the 1987 Facilities Plan.

ISSUE 6: Residents both inside and outside the City feel a lack of representation

- Some residents are not satisfied with the recent council ward redistricting, which resulted in unequal representation for Ward 5 and 7 in River Road and Santa Clara. There is speculation as to the rationale behind the boundaries.
- Some residents believe that their elected officials are indifferent to their representation needs, or that they have little voice in their future destiny.

ISSUE 7: Residents believe services are not provided equitably or are provided inconsistently.

- Some city residents do not believe they are receiving services for which they are assessed, while some nonresidents either do not want a city service or believe they will not receive services equivalent to what they are assessed.
- Some city residents resent lack of municipal services equal to other Eugene citizens (e.g. library, parks, swimming pools).
- County residents resent lack of adequate rural services. The Eugene Police Department continually provides public safety services for areas outside the city.

These opportunities have been identified through the interview process:

ISSUE 1: A legacy of community leadership exists in River Road and Santa Clara, dedicated to problem solving and planning with a “can-do” spirit.

- In 1968, the Santa Clara Citizens Committee prepared the “Santa Clara Land Use Plan.” In 1979, the River Road Citizen’s Organization and the Santa Clara Citizens Organization prepared the “River Road and Santa Clara Park and Recreation Master Plan.” In 1987, citizen advisory committee and staff team developed the “River Road-Santa Clara Urban Facilities Plan” as a refinement of the Metropolitan Area General Plan.
- For eighteen months, an 18-member citizens committee collaborated with Eugene planning staff to prepare the 2002 “River Road and Santa Clara Urban Services Committees Final Report and Recommendations.” This report is a benchmark document addressing service delivery issues and makes specific recommendations including a Transition Plan.

- Community stakeholders in River Road and Santa Clara have exceptional knowledge, creative thinking abilities, and a strong willingness to solve problems in the area.
- Illustrative of a citizen initiative is the recent announcement of a volunteer library to open in Santa Clara with a start-up budget of \$15,000.

ISSUE 2: Given the complex, volatile and cumbersome environment in River Road and Santa Clara, there is a unique opportunity to explore and examine new approaches to provide more efficient and effective urban service delivery, and in turn build community trust and confidence.

- The Metro Plan states that special districts within the Urban Growth Boundary shall be dissolved as city annexation occurs over time (Policy #17, II-B-6).
- The 2000 “River Road – Santa Clara Background Report” prepared by the Lane Council of Governments outlined seven “plausible options” for providing urban service delivery to the River Road/Santa Clara area. Some of these options would require amendments to the Metro Plan growth management policies. Consideration of these and other municipal governance options and phasing considerations is recognized as an appropriate and responsible approach to transition planning, and in turn will engender good will and trust of residents.

ISSUE 3: The River Road and Santa Clara area has rich history, special scenic, natural, and open space features, and other features that residents value.

- The City of Eugene is preparing a grant proposal to prepare a history of River Road within a context statement methodology, possibly including oral histories provided by local residents.
- Natural features of the River Road/Santa Clara area include wetlands, swales, vegetated sloughs, magnificent street trees, Flat and Spring Creeks, the Willamette River corridor, farmland, and scenic views of the Coburg Hills.
- Residents value the semi-rural character of tree-lined streets, fine gardens, and historic structures.
- Emerald Park and recreation facilities managed by the River Road Park District, parks and open space managed by the City of Eugene such as Awbrey Park and Rasor Park, the decommissioned Santa Clara Elementary School, and the new volunteer library are major assets highly valued by residents.
- The City of Eugene has acquired approximately five park properties in River Road and Santa Clara through the 1998 Park and Open Space Bond Program, and the City Council recently approved acquisition of a large community park on the northern edge of Santa Clara.

ISSUE 4: River Road and Santa Clara provide outstanding opportunities for collaboration, partnering and innovative thinking.

- Reviewing background documents that are over twenty years old, it is apparent that transportation and traffic patterns have largely shaped residential and commercial land use in River Road and Santa Clara. This may explain in part why residents value so highly the character and quality of their neighborhoods.

“Rasor Park was a model for how to address neighborhood needs in a way that includes local residents and identifies priorities.”

“River Road/Santa Clara seems to be where innovation is most needed as we have been ‘out of sight-out of mind’ for a long time.”

“We need to straighten out immediate problems and develop a new path that has mainstream endorsement, and make transition work.”

- Opportunities exist for new and innovative thinking to help preserve the values that are important to residents, including:
 - Context-sensitive street design (vs. conventional urban street standards), and alternatives assessments for upgrades.
 - Other urban design concepts, e.g. nodal development refinement
 - Decommissioned Santa Clara School prototype as an entrepreneurial city project
 - Community asset inventory project – engaging residents in a process to identify strengths and weakness, opportunities and threats in RR/SC
- A high degree of professionalism exists among all service providers – regardless of boundaries. This is an outstanding climate for collaborative approaches to service delivery and partnering possibilities that may not have been identified thus far.
- Changing demographics is creating a positive environment for problem solving.

ISSUE 5: The City of Eugene has responded to recommendations of the 2002 Urban Services Committee report to fund and develop a River Road and Santa Clara Transition Plan, create a contract position to facilitate the project, and prepare a fiscal analysis of urban services.

- The recently completed “Fiscal Analysis of Urban Services in River Road and Santa Clara” will provide a clear economic picture of revenues, costs, and levels of service in the area.
- A Transition Plan has been funded and a contract position created to facilitate the project.
- A staff interdepartmental team is providing support for preparing a Transition Plan.
- Efforts are underway to develop a partnership among all service providers to explore a wide variety of options for service delivery transition.

1. More information is needed

Existing and proposed IGAs, relevant information from taxing authorities, service providers, service area maps, background reports, and historical documents must be assembled and examined. The volume of information that stems from such a complex and complicated environment is huge, but it must be accessed and organized. A library is essential, perhaps some portions available to the public. High priority must be placed on providing better and more information to RR/SC residents to help them cope with a complex, confusing, and changing environment.

2. Short-term results and a long-term plan

The 1987 “Urban Facility Plan” is primarily an infrastructure plan, not a neighborhood plan. The refinement process could be initiated with a community asset inventory as a first installment, and ultimately a completed plan should be a long-range goal in the Transition Plan.

Short-term results are essential to gain trust and confidence of residents, and provide the optimum environment for preparing a creative, thoughtful, long-term Transition Plan. The Transition Team has identified a number of potential short-term actions that could provide, at the very least, symbolic, and in some cases, substantive changes that demonstrate the City's willingness to address concerns of area residents (e.g. implementing context-sensitive street design standards in the RR/SC area to help retain neighborhood character).

3. Not a monolithic environment

Any planning effort in River Road and Santa Clara must acknowledge and be sensitive to the different cultures, values, and opinions of residents. A triangulation of outreach methods will be essential to engage the community in creative problem solving. Public forums, surveys, workshops, interactive website access, and information/communication efforts must be utilized to the fullest potential. Transparency and inclusiveness must be the hallmark of public process.

4. Need for a strategic-oriented Transition Plan

The Transition Plan must have a dual purpose: (1) Preferred municipal governance and financing, and (2) Community planning and outreach. The approach must be well crafted, thoughtful, strategic, and flexible. There must always be an element of quid pro quo as milestones are reached. Aggressive annexation and expedited annexation could undermine efforts and make the hostile environment more hostile. First wins are essential to demonstrate results and positive outcomes in order to address more long range and complex issues and problems in a creative manner.

5. Legacy of problems, lack of trust, hostile environment

The long history of disenfranchisement, hostility, and tension must be addressed with a high degree of sensitivity, adaptation, willingness to take risk, and patience. There will be some failures mixed with success.

6. Testing ground – prototypes that can be applied city-wide

River Road and Santa Clara provide a magnificent opportunity to advance progressive urban growth, development, and design concepts that could be applied throughout the city. The legacy of disenfranchisement and fragmentation of services can be reversed by leveraging and promoting a clear purpose, vision, and achievable goals. The combined expertise of community leadership, residents, and professional staff is exceptional and will be the vehicle for a vision of success.

Next Steps

Upon review and comment by the City of Eugene and interested parties, this report will become the basis for preparing a work plan that will outline major elements of a Transition Plan for River Road and Santa Clara, including the preferred public process, phasing, time line, milestones, and outcomes.